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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

BOOKS OF MEDIEVAL AND MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY

The Baronial Opposition to Edward II., its Character and Policy: a Study in Administrative History. By JAMES CONWAY DAVIES, Emmanuel College, Cambridge. (Cambridge: University Press. 1918. Pp. x, 644. \$4.00.)

BISHOP STUBBS'S opinion of the reign of Edward II. was that it was an age when the public life of England stood at a very low level, and most readers feel that it is one of the most dreary of historical periods. Nothing has been done since Stubbs wrote to modify that particular opinion, but much has been recently done to show that the reign is more important in the constitutional history of England than we formerly supposed. This is especially true of the work of Professor Tout; and now Mr. Davies has published a minute study of most of the reign, showing similar conclusions. These studies are peculiarly welcome because they concern the differentiation, of which we know almost nothing, of administrative institutions from feudal forms of government. The process, as a differentiation, is made to stand out clearly by Mr. Davies.

His book in general is one to be grateful for, though it is not easy reading. It attends strictly to business and eschews all graces, and even sometimes carefulness, of expression. His main thesis is that the barons, recognizing the importance of the administrative system, tried to get control of it in order to control the government. His method is to take up one administrative institution after another, to state one after another his conclusions regarding it and its operation, and to illustrate each point with numerous detailed instances. Mr. Davies has subjected the records of the reign, the "Rolls" of all kinds, to a minuteness of search which is impressive but seems sometimes too fully reproduced for the reader. The result is, however, that much new light is thrown on the operation of government and also upon facts not particularly noted or in the intention of the author. He shows for example how Edward got business done which he did not wish to do himself, and gives us the impression that the king did more of the work of his office than we had thought. The royal prerogative, the position of the earl, the serjeanty tenure as the feudal endowment of administration (not quite so logically developed as it should be), the work of the executive and the use of the seals, the chamber as a financial institution, the work of the household and the transformation of its great offices into empty titles, chancery and exchequer, and many other topics receive full illustration.

Although the process going on in the reign is constantly referred to as one of differentiation, the necessary unconsciousness of this fact on the

part of those carrying it on seems to be overlooked, and with it the hold which the old ideas would have over their minds. This is particularly true with regard to the "curious combination of council and parliament" (p. 291) and to the relation of exchequer and chancery to the council. To the men of the time the process was not one of confusion (p. 290). The confusion is ours because we cannot get clearly into our minds all that is involved in the differentiation. The author's facts show Parliament and council growing more apart, but the differentiation still incomplete, as we should expect. If Mr. Davies intends to imply (pp. 291-293) that the name Parliament was then restricted to meetings in which the new representative elements were present, the fact would be surprising, but he is probably only making a distinction of his own. It is also not to be thought strange that exchequer and chancery still occasionally act as council; it would be strange if at that date they had not now and then done so.

It must not be inferred that the book deals with institutional details only. It states clearly the constitutional significance of the age and strongly supports past conclusions as to its contribution to this side of things. Indeed Mr. Davies shows more fully than has been done before how the opposition carries forward the tradition begun by Magna Carta. In his interpretation of the fundamental principles of the Great Charter and of the details of their development during the thirteenth century, his discussion is closely parallel to that of the reviewer's *Origin of the English Constitution*, though he does not refer to that book. He sums up in these words (p. 542):

The best that can be said of the baronial opposition in general is that it sought to subject the king, no less than his people, to the rule of law. The great principle contained in Magna Carta that the king was under the law, was very open to misinterpretation, and the policy of the barons partly laid them open to this charge. Viewed from the best light the aims of the opposition were to secure the omnipotence of law and to lessen the powers the king might exercise to the detriment, or in negation, of law.

G. B. ADAMS.

Isabel of Castile and the Making of the Spanish Nation, 1451-1504.

By IERNE L. PLUNKET. [Heroes of the Nations.] (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1919. Pp. xi, 432. \$1.90.)

THIS is an exceedingly well-written book, and it comes as near to serious historical presentation as a work of a semi-popular character can do. The author's method of handling her subject inspires confidence, even though she refrains from the use of page citations and foot-notes. And, indeed, there are many lengthy and well-selected quotations from sources that are well-known to him who would even be critical in this field of history. Andres Bernaldez, Pulgar, Sabatini, Zurita, and Marineo Siculo form the basis of the work, and in thrilling parts even Prescott and Washington Irving are not excluded from quotation.